ECU to purchase Stratford Arms

By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Saturday, February 26, 2011

East Carolina University will purchase Stratford Arms Apartments for $3,125,000 pending approval from the state, and officials continue to discuss the future of the Chancellor's residence.

The ECU Board of Trustees at its regular meeting Friday voted unanimously to allow the university to purchase the 12-acre apartment complex on South Charles Boulevard. No action was taken on the Chancellor's residence except a communication agreement was formalized between the university, the city and the neighborhood.

The plan is to convert the apartment complex into parking for the athletic facilities directly across the boulevard, including Dowdy-Ficklen and Clark-LeClair stadiums. There are 146 apartments in 13 buildings in the complex. A deadline for residents moving out is still to come from the apartment's corporate owners, according to complex manager Karen Irizarry.

“All residents will be notified appropriately when the decision has been made,” Irizarry said.

“No one is going to be evicted,” university spokesman John Durham said.

The university actually will be purchasing the property from the ECU Real Estate Foundation, which first purchased the property at the same price following the November trustees meeting.

The purchase is contingent on approval from the UNC system Board of Governors and other state agencies involved when a public entity purchases land, Durham said.

The purchase will be funded by auxiliary overhead receipt funds, which come from self-sustaining university enterprises like the bookstore and print shop, Durham said. No state funding will go toward the acquisition.

The trustees agreed on a vision statement between the university, the city of Greenville and the Tar River and University Neighborhood Association (TRUNA) regarding the Chancellor's residence on Fifth Street. The Dail House serves as both the Chancellor's private home and a venue for public receptions, an arrangement that has become problematic due to space.
A committee has been looking at other residences for the chancellor and options for converting the Dail House. The vision statement lists common goals, such as preserving the historical value of the area, and establishes policies of open communication. In addition to the trustees, TRUNA has approved the vision statement. The city will address the agreement next week.

In other business, the trustees also voted unanimously to buy the 1940 Harvey House at the corner of East Rock Springs Road and 14th Street for $165,000 as the location near Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium is considered strategic.

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or (252) 329-9567.
Floyd Mattheis is honored by his colleagues for his 50 years of dedication to East Carolina University, the College of Education and his work in science education. Susan Ganter with the College of Education presents Mattheis with a plaque.

ECU Notes: 50-year career honored
ECU News Service
Sunday, February 27, 2011

Over the course of his fifty years at East Carolina University, Floyd Mattheis has worked to change the face of science education. To celebrate his dedication to the College of Education and his contributions to the profession, the college hosted an event in his honor Feb. 17 at Brook Valley Country Club.

“I feel very honored to have worked at ECU for such a long time,” Mattheis said. “During that period I have worked with many wonderful colleagues and students. I'm continuing to work at ECU with the Summer Ventures program because I'm inspired by the outstanding faculty, residence life staff and students in this great and unique program.”

During his tenure at ECU, Mattheis has impacted the lives of students, faculty members and the surrounding community, his colleagues said.

At the beginning of his career, Mattheis directed summer science experiences for children in grades three through 12, exposing thousands of children to science education, outdoor-based science living and learning experiences as well as ECU's campus, science faculty and facilities. He sought financial assistance for those who could not afford to attend.

As the chairman of the Department of Science Education (now the Department of Mathematics, Science and Instructional Technology Education), he helped jump-start the careers of many new science teachers by actively engaging them in national research on science teaching, including them on national, regional, and state presentations and supporting their professional development. Many of his former students are now leaders across the country in curriculum, higher education and public education.
Mattheis believes strongly in public education and worked diligently to ensure mathematics and science teachers received high quality, sustained professional development as the director of the ECU Science and Mathematics Center (now the Center for Science, Mathematics and Technology Education).

Mattheis continues to serve as director of the Summer Ventures in Science and Mathematics, a free enrichment program for academically motivated high school students potentially interested in a career in science or mathematics.

His commitment to superior science education opportunities for U.S. students led to his active participation in the development of the National Science Standards. His work and untiring dedication to science education has resulted in many awards and honors during his time at ECU, including the National Science Teachers Association Distinguished Service to Science Education award in 1991 and the Robert H. Carleton Award for National Leadership in the Field of Science Education in 1996.

Mattheis and his wife, Pauline, created an endowment in 1997 that funds scholarships for upper level students with a 3.0 GPA who are majoring in science education. Nine students have been awarded the scholarship to date.

Susan Ganter, chairwoman of the Department of Mathematics, Science and Instructional Technology Education, said, “In his 50 years at ECU, he has truly made a difference — in the programs, in the university, and most importantly, in the people he has touched. It was important for us to recognize Dr. Mattheis, a man who truly embodies the Pirate spirit.”

Poet to read her work at ECU

Poet Lavonne Adams will present a public reading of her original work on Monday at ECU.

Adams, who teaches in the MFA program at UNC-Wilmington, is the author of three award-winning poetry collections, including “Through the Glorieta Pass,” which won the 2007 Pearl Poetry Prize.

Adams also published “Everyday Still Life” in 1999, which won the Persephone Poetry Book Award, and “In the Shadow of the Mountain” in 2004, which won the Randall Jarrell/Harperprints Poetry Chapbook Competition. Both were published by the North Carolina Writers' Network.

Adams' teaching interests also include the use of research in writing poetry, a kind of poetry for which she has a fascination. Prior to her reading, she will be talking to graduate students in ECU's Creative Writing Program about her uses of research in her poetry.

Adams' reading will begin at 8 p.m. in Bate Building Room 1028. Admission is free, and parking restrictions around Bate will be lifted for this event.
To read a selection of Adams' poetry: http://uncw.edu/writers/faculty_lavonne.html For more information, contact Alex Albright, director of creative writing at ECU, at 328-4876.

**Twins head back to ECU together**

Often graduate students pursue degrees in the same field of study as their undergraduate degrees; not so for May 2009 ECU graduates Mekara and Natara Bryant.

The twin sisters graduated from ECU in May 2009 with undergraduate degrees in psychology and management information systems, respectively, and are pursuing master's degrees in the software engineering program at the College of Technology and Computer Science at ECU.

Soon after graduation, Mekara said she realized she wanted to head back to school. After researching the top-paid master's degree careers, she found that software engineers were at the top of the list.

Convincing her twin Natara to join her in pursuing a graduate degree in software engineering was a challenge, since Natara was planning to pursue a different program. It would take weeks, but Mekara won out.

“I told my sister, society has already concluded that we are against the odds of being successful in this program for a variety of reasons: we're females, we're African-American, and I didn't have the computer science-related background,” said Mekara. “But as I saw it, your background does not always determine success, but by how hard you're willing to work and your attitude.”

Mekara also knew persuading a software engineering program to accept her, as a candidate with a degree in psychology, would be a long shot. But then she met with M. Nasseh Tabrizi, professor of computer science and director of the program, who listened to Mekara and offered advice about applying to graduate school.

Although both sisters admitted that the program is difficult, their hard work and determination has paid off. Both sisters earned A's and B's in all classes. In May, they will graduate with a master's degree in software engineering.

“I knew that with a strong belief in ourselves, we could excel at anything we put our minds to,” Natara said. “Our parents, Alphonzo and Alice Bryant, instilled that in us.”

Tabrizi and David White, dean of the College of Technology and Computer Science, said that they could not be prouder of the sisters' accomplishments.

“This is what our college is all about, creating opportunities to give all a chance who want to achieve their goals,” White said. “Our hope is that other students will read this story and become inspired to achieve their dream too.”
Upcoming Events:

Sunday-Tuesday: “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee,” presented by the ECU School of Theatre and Dance, continues through Tuesday in McGinnis Theatre. Ticketed event. Purchase tickets online at www.ECUARTS.com or by phone 1-800-ECU-ARTS.

Thursday: Screening of “Awake, My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp,” 8 p.m., Speight Auditorium in the Jenkins Fine Arts Center. Matt Hinton, producer/director, will discuss the film after its screening. Part of the Southern Circuit, tour of independent filmmakers. Free for ECU students; $5 general admission tickets.

See www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm for times, places and more information on these events and other ECU upcoming activities.
Keith LeClair biography at Sheppard
Sunday, February 27, 2011

Sheppard Memorial Library has a new title sure to interest biography and baseball fans. The story of former East Carolina University baseball coach Keith LeClair's life and his battle with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is detailed in Bethany Bradsher's new book “Coaching Third: The Keith LeClair Story.”

From LeClair's passion for baseball growing up in Walpole, N.H., to his playing and coaching days at Western Carolina University to his coaching days at East Carolina University — leading his team toward a goal of reaching Omaha, Neb., and the College World Series — Bradsher covers the life of the courageous coach and the support of his courageous wife, children, parents, siblings, friends, church family, colleagues and players.

LeClair, Bradsher writes, had a goal of playing in baseball's major leagues. He did end up playing in the Atlanta Braves' farm system, but Bradsher said he grew frustrated with the minor league baseball system and eventually found his way to Western Carolina University. He first became an assistant baseball coach at WCU and later became the school's head baseball coach.

LeClair developed health problems in 2001 and eventually received a diagnosis of ALS. His family, his church family, his college families (Western Carolina and East Carolina), friends, and health care providers supported him in numerous ways during his battle, and Bradsher also writes that LeClair's faith helped him during difficult times. Pictures of LeClair coaching and his family are included in the book. This title is sure to appeal to biography, baseball and East Carolina University fans.

This book is available at Sheppard Memorial Library.

Kim Averette is serials librarian at Sheppard Memorial Library.
As North Carolina beaches erode, debate rises
Beach towns must decide who pays to save their strands, as state mulls options

By Bruce Henderson
bhenderson@charlotteobserver.com
Posted: Sunday, Feb. 27, 2011

NAGS HEAD A devouring sea has frayed the front lines of this old beach resort. Kids splashed last summer in the waves under an oceanfront row of cottages on the eroding south end. Huge sandbags fortified pilings, and the steps of condemned houses dangled in the air above the sand.

"We wanted close to the beach, and that's exactly what we got," vacationer Rod Daugherty of Greenville, Pa., said as the tide lapped under the deck of his rental house. Rising seas probably played a role in the erosion gnawing at much of the East Coast over the past century, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says. As the seas start to rise faster, it warns, erosion will only get worse.

A state science panel expects sea level on the N.C. coast to rise 1 meter by 2100. The low, flat northeastern shore, including the Outer Banks, is among the nation's most vulnerable places. State planners are already calculating the odds of higher water in coastal road and bridge designs and in assessing property risks. Insurance rates are going up on the coast as insurers brace for the next big hurricane.

The debate on the N.C. oceanfront, meanwhile, is not why beaches are eroding but how to save them: Who pays the millions needed to pump sand ashore?
Should the state allow structures that stabilize some stretches of beach but may starve others?
Will the urge to protect real estate destroy some public beaches?

State legislators took up the fight last week, with a bill that critics say would upset the uneasy balance between development and nature. The bill would allow terminal groins, which jut into the sea like fingers, trapping sand along inlets. Groins could stabilize the eroding ends of barrier islands, including the tony enclaves of Bald Head Island and private Figure Eight Island near Wilmington.

But while groins stop erosion on one side, they can magnify it on the other. North Carolina and Oregon are the only two states that forbid hard structures such as seawalls and groins, which may protect property at the expense of a natural beach. State policy holds beaches in trust for public use. Every wave of development and every beach-gobbling nor'easter make that line harder to hold.

The barrier islands and their beaches are restless by nature. Currents, wind and storms incessantly reshape them, depositing sand here, whisking it away there. Inlets between the islands change course often, wagging back and forth like a retriever's tail. Rooted on those islands is $7.7 billion in insured real estate, from weathered cottages to gleaming high-rises. Preserving those buildings means trying to out-flank nature.

"If we think we can engineer our way out of it, we're on a downhill slide," said Stan Riggs, an East Carolina University geologist who has studied the N.C. coast for 40 years. "If there's one environment on our planet that has limits to growth and development, it's the barrier islands."

**Is spending justified?**
N.C. insured-property losses from hurricanes averaged $10.6 million a year (in 2005 dollars) from 1949 to 1988, the Property Casualty Insurers Association of America says. As development grew and hurricane activity intensified, average losses between 1989 and 2005 soared to $296 million a year.

Taxpayers share the burden, helping pay to repair storm damages and pump sand. The federal flood-insurance program has rebuilt homes that have been repeatedly flooded on the N.C. coast.

Beach towns argue that the spending is justified because they draw visitors from all over, fueling the state's $20 billion tourism industry. "I don't think anybody questions whether you should be doing these kinds of projects. The question is who should pay for it," said Harry Simmons, executive director of the N.C. Beach, Inlet & Waterway Association.

Critics counter that it's a waste of public money to try to hold in place a constantly shifting environment.
As seas rise, the barrier islands must move west and south to survive, said Sam Pearsall, an Environmental Defense Fund scientist.

"Nailing them down will kill them," he said. "Groins and seawalls and other hardened structures are basically nailing them down."

**Contentious votes**

Nowhere is the argument more visceral, and the costs more staggering, than in the beach towns facing sink-or-swim decisions.

A growing number of communities covering about one-third of the 320-mile N.C. oceanfront - half of it undeveloped - pump sand onto their eroding beaches or plan to. The practice, called nourishment, protects property from storms and erosion.

But it costs about $1 million a mile and must be repeated every few years. Wrightsville Beach near Wilmington has been replenished a state-record 26 times since 1939.

Federal money for such projects has withered in the past decade, and even the property owners who would benefit are balking at paying their share. Voters in Dare and Carteret counties, along with Nags Head, have rejected beach taxes. Property owners in North Topsail Beach recently refused to pay for sand.

"What almost always happens in these votes is that it pits the oceanfront owners against everybody else," said Frank Tursi, assistant director of the N.C. Coastal Federation.

State, federal and local governments have spent $86 million on N.C. nourishment projects over the past decade.

Opponents predict the state could end up paying for groins, too. Groins cost $3.5 million to $10 million to build, according to a state study, and up to $2 million a year to maintain. The structures hold sand in place, making beach nourishment more effective, the study said. But they can also cause erosion by impeding the flow of sand down the strand.

Last week's bill would allow groins only when other measures, including moving houses, aren't practical. It requires environmental studies, monitoring of the groins while they're in place, and steps for removing those that cause problems.

A groin measure not limited to inlets failed in 2009. This year's version has Senate majority leader Harry Brown, R-Onslow, among its primary sponsors and bipartisan support from coastal senators.

"It's just time we try something different" to control erosion, said Brown, who expects the bill to pass. Though a new Republican majority faces a $2.7 billion budget shortfall, he predicts legislators will see groins as a local tool that won't cost the state any money.
**Fighting a battle with nature**
Mayor Debbie Smith of Ocean Isle Beach figures repairs, property losses and protective measures along Shallotte Inlet have cost $62 million in private and public money in the past decade.

"We have lost streets, sewer lines, water lines," Smith said. "It just gets to the point where you need another tool to manage those shifting inlets."

Federal money helps pay to pump sand on three miles of beach, she said, but it would be fruitless near the inlet without a groin to hold sand in place.
The state has granted exceptions to its hard-structure ban, allowing groins at Oregon Inlet on the northern Banks and at the Fort Macon historic site near Morehead City.

"If you didn't have a record of these things working, and working well, we wouldn't be having this conversation," said Simmons of the beach association. He expects groins to be sought for only a handful of the state's 19 inlets.

Critics say groins would increase pressure for more such structures, leading to an N.C. shoreline that resembles New Jersey's saw-toothed coast. They predict lawsuits over erosion among property owners and local governments.

It would be cheaper to simply let the sea take threatened homes, a recent study found.

Western Carolina University researchers say building groins at all 10 inlets where structures are at risk would save $18 million in property tax revenues over 30 years. But a single large groin could cost up to $54 million to build and maintain for three decades.

"There's a misperception among communities that every property that's threatened needs to be protected," said Andrew Coburn of WCU's Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines.
"If these communities are so important, why are they constantly looking for handouts?"

**Repair and risk**
Faced with a $36 million bet - the cost of its first nourishment project - Mayor Bob Oakes says Nags Head has no choice but to gamble.

Seven hurricanes have lashed the town since 1995, wearing at the 10-mile beach. Hurricane Isabel took out dunes on the south end in 2003, forcing the town to abandon some beach roads. Harsh Nor'easters in late 2009 left 26 condemned homes; 15 have been moved or torn down.

"Our first priority is to keep a clean and beautiful beach, and after that, protect our tax base," Oakes said. "You have to protect the reason the tourists want to come here."

The state's most recent analysis, in 1998, found that 68 percent of the ocean beaches were eroding, at up to 15 feet a year. Sandbags now protect 352 homes and other buildings.
Nags Head plans to split the cost of new sand, which it expects to last 10 years, between a Dare County beach fund and a bond to be repaid by occupancy taxes. The town still has to come up with another $10 million, and that has fueled a furious debate.

Beach property owners were asked to help pay for the project through a special assessment. Little more than half agreed, and the town - intent on starting work in April - is now considering tax increases.

Barry Brockway, a Brooklyn lawyer who owns a house that's now oceanfront because of erosion, says it's a no-brainer to pay. Most of the money, he notes, would come from tourists renting vacation homes.

"They're all benefiting from the beach, whether or not they're oceanfront," he said of his fellow property owners. "I can't guarantee this will work, but it's a risk worth taking."

Reed and June Fisher own an oceanfront cottage built in 1866. The house has been moved back from the eroding beach at least three times, but the winter storms push the high tide perilously close. "If anybody needs nourishment, it's us," Reed Fisher said.

Instead, the Fishers were among 44 people who sued the town this month. The suit was over the town's condemnation of property to pump sand this spring, but the couple's concerns run deeper. Nor'easters could quickly wipe away the fresh sand, they say, and the town has no fallback plan.

"It's not that we're against beach nourishment; clearly it has worked in some areas," Fisher said. "The difference here is what happens after that."

**No option to retreat**
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which oversees the project, says retreat is no option.

Only 16 N.C. beach houses have been moved back from the sea in the past two years.

Nags Head represents so much of Dare County's tax base that loss of its oceanfront houses would drive up taxes countywide, said a Corps environmental analysis. Relocating 137 homes would cost $474 million, it said, compared to the $36 million to pump sand.

On the beach, vacationer Denise Carroll of Colorado Springs, Colo., said she spent summers in Nags Head as a child. Her kids like to come too for the pounding waves, which pack more beach-chewing energy than any on the East Coast.

"I'd rather (pump sand) than see the beach lined with sandbags," Carroll said. "On the other hand, it could all wash away. The ocean's going to take what it wants. "But then, I don't have hundreds of thousands of dollars invested here."
Bridge to be replaced - as island shrinks
Outer Banks residents unsure how N.C. 12 can stay above water at eroding Pea Island.

By Bruce Henderson
bhenderson@charlotteobserver.com
Posted: Sunday, Feb. 27, 2011

After more than 20 years of study, the N.C. Department of Transportation has federal approval to replace the creaky Outer Banks bridge that connects Nags Head to Hatteras. But some geologists predict the perils of the bridge over Oregon Inlet are far from over. The problem is on the southern end of the new $300million span, a storm-washed, eroding spit of land called Pea Island.

Nobody's quite sure how N.C. 12, once it crosses the bridge, can stay above water as rising sea level and erosion attack the narrow island. DOT elected to build the bridge now and figure out N.C. 12 later.

More than $92million has been spent to maintain the bridge and the road at Pea Island since 1983, East Carolina University geologists Stan Riggs and Dorothea Ames report. A terminal groin has stabilized the inlet, they say, but also likely has increased erosion on Pea Island.

DOT bulldozers that push storm-blown sand back onto the artificial dunes built to protect the road prevent the island's natural migration west, they say. As 13 feet a year of its ocean side erodes away, the island is growing thinner.

"If you think of the sand as a budget, we're in deficit spending," said Jan DeBlieu of the N.C. Coastal Federation.

By other calculations, the problem will grow worse. The Interior Department, which runs the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, predicts sections of N.C. 12 "will be consistently under water from erosion and the effects of sea level rise" by 2030.

Beth Smyre, DOT's project planning engineer, said continued monitoring of conditions will give engineers a better grip on how to stabilize the road. Possible solutions include elevating parts of the road or moving it.

Based on public comments filed with the state, most Outer Banks residents will be relieved to replace the repair-prone Bonner Bridge, built in 1963.
"Every time you go across the bridge, you wonder if you're going to be able to get back," said Hatteras resident Beth Midgett, who formed a citizens group to lobby for replacing it.

Environmental advocates, and initially DOT, had favored building a longer bridge that would swing west over Pamlico Sound, avoiding the N.C. 12 erosion hot spots. DOT now says that design would cost too much at up to $1.4 billion.

Riggs predicts that continuing to fortify N.C. 12 will hasten the island's collapse. He says ferries or water taxis would be better suited to crossing the inlet. "The best days of that road are over," he said.
Trash on porches and vehicles parked in yards are a few of the concerns councilwoman Marion Blackburn has as she walks the streets of the neighborhoods across 5th Street from East Carolina University Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2011. Blackburn sought council backing for a violation-based rental registry that would help crack down on absentee landlords or other property owners who aren't meeting minimum housing standards. (Justin Falls/The Daily Reflector)

**Rental issues stir council members**

*By Kathryn Kennedy*

The Daily Reflector

Sunday, February 27, 2011

When Councilwoman Marion Blackburn drives around her district, she can rattle off code violations as easily as her phone number or birth date.

Indoor furniture is not allowed on porches. Trash not picked up by public works should be taken to the landfill, otherwise, it goes in green receptacles. Cars can't be parked on unimproved surfaces. Sagging porches are a safety hazard.

“Students deserve to live in attractive, safe neighborhoods,” she said. “(So do) the poor. Any renter.”

Across downtown, Councilwoman Rose Glover has a similar routine. Citizens call her with concerns about living conditions and, without hesitation, Glover walks through their homes to see things for herself. She's appalled by what she finds: Black mold and broken faucets, space heaters the size of radios as the only heat source.

“If you can't cook your own child a meal there, no one should be living there,” she said, paraphrasing a mantra of local code enforcement officers.

The Tar River/University Neighborhood Association and the west Greenville neighborhoods are both aging single-family areas predominantly occupied by renters. Data from the city's Community Development Department indicates 68 percent of TRUNA homes are rental property. Rentals account for 76 percent of housing in west Greenville, defined as the blocks flanking Fifth Street and extending south to Farmville.
Boulevard and Dickinson Avenue. Most Greenville single-family neighborhoods have 20 percent or lower rental rates.

But the women representing those areas have different ideas of how best to combat issues accompanying slum properties and absentee landlords.

Blackburn pitched a familiar idea last month for a rental registry for single-family zoning areas. It was recommended by a neighborhood task force assembled in 2004 but never enacted. She wants to hit landlords' pocketbooks and sees TRUNA as the perfect place to pilot a program requiring enrollment and a minor participation fee.

She envisions inspections by code officers between tenants, so that if issues aren't addressed, the property can't be rented. Repeat offenders would be systematically flagged and fined. The details aren't finalized, but she thinks city staff could develop something worthwhile.

Glover said she wouldn't support any mandatory program involving fees because costs will only get passed on to the tenants.

The suggestion also is not warmly received by other colleagues on the council, who argue it's unnecessary and point to programs in other cities that proved cost-prohibitive. Blackburn counters Greenville could learn from their mistakes.

Glover advocates expanding the system that's in place. She can see change in her district since code enforcement became part of the Greenville Police Department in 2009, she said last week. The city's six code officers are divided among the four community policing areas. West Greenville and TRUNA each get two officers rather than one, and an additional officer partly paid by East Carolina University patrols the university area.

Lt. Earl Phipps leads code enforcement and said he can always use more officers. One retired Friday and he hopes to fill that position quickly.

He and his staff patrol the city, locating violations and knocking on doors. After initial contact, there's follow-up because they want a problem abated within 10 days. Fines can be levied in cases of non-compliance.

“We don't just take a report and assume everybody does what they're supposed to do,” Phipps said.

It takes more time with cases where housing doesn't meet the minimum requirements for livability. Those can run down a neighborhood and affect those living around them, Phipps said. It can take months for a property owner to improve conditions to the city standard, with dozens of interactions required.

“We don't go in heavy-handed,” Phipps added. “We go in building partnerships and educating folks.”
They find many minimum housing violations during “six-month checks,” which are performed if utilities are off and a house is vacant for that long a period.

“I have been so proud,” Glover said. “They have done so much work in such a short time.”

Phipps said the public can always be more involved by learning about city codes and calling in violations. “Don't feel like it's a burden to us to call us,” he said. “That's why we're here.” Blackburn, too, applauds their work. But she said it's not enough. “We're asking the taxpayers to fund work that should be done by the property owners,” she said.

Phipps noted Tuesday that individuals are billed if problems aren't addressed and city contractors have to fix things. He couldn't provide collection rates, as other city departments are responsible for that aspect of enforcement.

While housing issues in TRUNA can damage property appearance and deter people from buying there, they don't yet breed the crime concerns held by homeowners in west Greenville. Glover reports abandoned structures — which are highest in number in her district, Phipps said — because they become magnets for drug dealers and other illicit activities.

“If you're a criminal, you're going to go to the worst-looking neighborhood and set up business,” Glover said.

Residences that should have been torn down years ago are finally being taken care of, she said. Local government must continue to make the neighborhoods between the city's greatest assets — ECU and the hospital — a livable community.

“It's a long process,” Glover continued, later adding that she can't imagine TRUNA ever becoming like west Greenville because elected officials and their active neighborhood association wouldn't allow it.

Code enforcement records show west Greenville also tops the city for illegal dumping — when things that Public Works trucks don't pick up are left sitting on lots. It can be a hazard to children living and playing in the area, Phipps said. And, it's unsightly.

TRUNA ranks highest for occupancy violations. Greenville city code dictates that only three unrelated people can live in one dwelling. Another hurdle specific to TRUNA is that new batches of freshmen arrive in the neighborhood every year, Phipps said. They have to be taught what's legal and what isn't.

There are efforts in both areas to increase home-ownership rates. City-funded grants are offered to homebuyers purchasing in TRUNA. A $5 million revitalization bond issued in
2004 was used, in part, to purchase west Greenville homes for renovation or demolition. New homes have gone up and subsidies significantly lower the costs to buyers.

At the Jan. 29 city council planning session, Blackburn asked that her peers be brave enough to admit there is a problem with housing around the center city. Permeation of rental housing there is deteriorating the city's oldest neighborhoods, she said. Blackburn wants to protect tenants' rights and quality of life in neighborhoods, but there's also a bottom line.

“There are many good landlords interested in protecting the property value of their homes,” she said this month. “But most landlords are not looking to do much more than make a return. Some let it go and go and go — there needs to be some kind of remedy.

“I don't care how we solve it. I want to find a way to address it ... and I don't want to wait a year before trying.”

Reports on existing methods to secure code compliance are forthcoming, said City Attorney Dave Holec. It's unclear, as of yet, what shape any further action might take.

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@reflector.com or (252) 329-9566.
Tuition rates for Duke University undergraduate students will rise 4.3 percent in the 2011-12 academic year.

The increase, approved Saturday by Duke's Board of Trustees, will push tuition to $40,665.

Total costs for students at the elite private university - including room, board and fees - will rise 3.9 percent to $53,905 in the next academic year.

"Costs continue to go up [faster than inflation] in many of the areas that are critical to the university," Duke spokesman Michael Schoenfeld said Sunday. He cited health insurance and energy costs as two areas where costs have been mushrooming.

Duke has frozen pay and eliminated jobs in recent years as it works to cut $100 million in expenses out of its annual operating budget. Since early 2009, nearly 400 workers have accepted buyout offers; their jobs subsequently were eliminated.

"Overall, the university strives to keep tuition increases as low as possible," Schoenfeld said.

Last month, the UNC system's Board of Governors, bracing for another round of state budget cuts, approved an average increase of 6.8 percent for fees and tuition for the 2011-12 academic year.

For in-state undergraduates, tuition and fees at UNC-Chapel Hill are set to rise $352 to $6,840 per year, N.C. State University's tuition and fees will rise $481 to $6,874, and N.C. Central University's will climb $241 to $4,720.

At Duke, more than 40 percent of students receive financial aid based on financial need, in addition to those who receive scholarships based on athletics and academics.

Schoenfeld said the financial aid budget hasn't been set for next year but is likely to increase 8 percent to 10 percent - double the tuition rate increase. That 2-to-1 ratio between financial aid and tuition increases has held constant in recent years, he added.

Duke expects to spend about $110.2 million on financial aid during the current school year - up from $99.8 million in 2009-2010.

"Duke has a very strong commitment to financial aid and affordability," Schoenfeld said.

This month, USA Today and the Princeton Review ranked Duke No. 2 among private colleges nationwide for being a "best value." That ranking assesses the effect of financial aid as well as tuition and other costs.
Duke also increased its tuition at graduate and professional schools Saturday. Tuition for MBA students at the Fuqua School of Business will rise 4.9 percent to $50,300; tuition for law school students will rise 4 percent to $48,800.

The price increase for undergraduates comes on top of a 3.9 percent rise in tuition and fees for the current school year, which pushed the cost of attending above the $50,000 mark for the first time.

"It's important to remember that tuition doesn't cover, in fact it doesn't come close to covering, the full cost of education" at private universities, Schoenfeld said. "The rest of the costs are made up by things like income from the endowment, fundraising and other sources of revenue."

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Texas still a literary magnet
UT Press is one of many publishers churning out hits.

By Steve Bennett, By Steve Bennett
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Despite our persistent (and completely inaccurate, if not unjustified) yahoo reputation nationally, Texas remains a literary magnet. Lots of Texans are writing books. And lots of “foreign” writers are writing books about us. Some of these volumes may have flown under your radar, but they are definitely worth perusing.

The University of Texas Press, one of the state's most dynamic publishers, has three very different books out this month.

“Trillin on Texas” (UT Press, $22) gathers The New Yorker and Nation writer Calvin Trillin's essays and reportage on the Lone Star State, with titles ranging from “By Meat Alone,” about our second-to-none smoked barbecue, to “If the Boot Fits …,” an internal argument over the 43rd president's use of language and whether George W. Bush was “simply a doofus.” Obviously, the piece was written before Bush became a best-selling author.

The second book is “We Were Not Orphans: Stories from the Waco State Home” (UT Press, $29.95), Sherry Matthews' poignant illustrated oral history fleshing out the difficult lives of “dependent and neglected” children committed to the Waco State Home from the 1920s to the '70s. In the Foreword, Robert Draper defines the Waco home as “the de facto safety net for children who had committed no crime other than the offense of being poor.”

Last but not least from UT is “State of Minds: Texas Culture and Its Discontents” (UT Press, $29.95), Don Graham's take on Texas literary giants from J. Frank Dobie to Larry McMurtry and Cormac McCarthy. Graham — with great gusto — is the J. Frank Dobie Regents Professor of American and English Literature at UT. The waiting list for his “Life and Literature of the Southwest” class is longer than a South Texas heat wave. “From a Land Far Away” (Tate Publishing, $20.99) is the story of Wes Trueblood's deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan with the Air Force. Based out of Lackland, Trueblood offers the truthful account of the daily lives of our soldiers and allies, told in the form of letters he wrote home.

Shirley Mock, a research fellow in archaeology at UT-Austin, explores the role that Black Seminole women have played in shaping a “maroon” culture in Texas and Mexico born of African roots and shaped by southeastern Indian and Mexican influences in her book “Dreaming with Ancestors” (University of Oklahoma Press, $34.95).
During the Civil War, printers supported the war effort by producing a vast array of envelopes with imagery promoting both the Union and the Confederacy. In “Patriotic Envelopes of the Civil War” (LSU Press, $36.96), UTSA history professor Stephen R. Boyd explores this iconography — flags, Miss Liberty, political leaders, even runaway slaves — in an effort to understand what motivated both soldiers and civilians to support a war that turned out to be much more bloody and protracted than anyone dreamed.

With all due respect to Bram Stoker, Austin author Cynthia Leitich Smith unites the casts of her young adult best-sellers “Tantalize” and “Eternal” in her new YA vampire novel “Blessed” (Candlewick, $17.99) Here, neophyte teen bloodsucker Quincie Morris is in the fight of her life — or undead — while struggling to clear her best friend and true love — the hybrid-werewolf Kieren — of murder charges.

In some places, it's a concrete-and-steel wall worthy of Huntsville; in others, it's little more than a rusty barbed-wire fence. Sociologist Robert Lee Maril explores the 2,000-mile barrier project along the U.S./Mexico border in “The Fence” (Texas Tech University Press, $29.95), coming in March. Maril, director of the Center for Diversity and Inequality Research at East Carolina University, interviewed border residents, military men, government contractors, patrol agents, Minutemen, activists and many others to get at the question: Is it working?

Also from the Lubbock-based press comes “If I Was a Highway” (Texas Tech, $29.95), featuring “wisdom from a lifetime on the road” courtesy journalist, poet, novelist and Austin Chronicle columnist Michael Ventura, with photographs by singer/songwriter Butch Hancock. The book is Ventura's heartland journey, a record of “the country in motion as seen from the road, an America often in trouble but still unfinished, still re-creating itself, always to be discovered anew.”

San Antonio photographer Al Rendon captures the pageantry and narrative of the charreada in the picture book “Charreada: Mexican Rodeo in Texas” (University of North Texas Press, $19.95). Featuring 73 duotone images (sort of sepia flavored) of traditional moves such as el coleadero, which involves a horseback rider grabbing a running bull by the tail and bringing him down, the book also features essays by Bryan Woolley, Julia Hambric and Francis Abernethy, the Texas Folklore Society publications editor.

Keep an eye out in coming months for:
Fort Worth writer Jeff Guinn's “The Last Gunfight: The Real Story of the Shootout at the O.K. Corral — And How It Changed the American West” (Simon & Schuster, $27, May).
Michael Wallis' “David Crockett: The Lion of the West” (W.W. Norton, $26.95, May).
“I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive” (Houghton Miflin, $26, May 12), a novel about Doc Ebersole, the last man to see Hank Williams alive, by Texas (yes, we still claim him) singer/songwriter Steve Earle.
Vanceboro man steps down as Perdue adviser

Sue Book  2011-02-26
Brynn Thomas of Vanceboro is another Gov. Bev Eaves Perdue adviser making a midterm exit.

Thomas, a vice president in Thomas Development Inc. of New Bern, was an N.C. Ports Authority member when he left to serve the governor for two years as a senior adviser in assorted matters.

Thomas confirmed that “Yes, I will be returning to New Bern to my previous job at TDI. My last day in the governor’s office will be March 4.

“I took this position with the understanding that I would one day return to my career,” he said. “The two-year mark is just a good time to make the change as you see with others in the governor’s administration and at the federal level.

“It has been such a great experience,” said Thomas, who has a political science degree from East Carolina University and is a member of a political family. He is the son of Craven County School Board vice chairperson Linda Thomas and former state senator Joe Thomas of Vanceboro and brother of former state senator and current District Attorney Scott Thomas.

“I have been fortunate to work with some really great folks,” Thomas said, “but I am looking forward to being home. He said he has no plans to run for office; “I will be focused on business.”

Chris Mackey of the governor’s communications office said: “His door is literally eight feet from hers.”

Perdue is in Washington, D.C., until Tuesday at meetings including the National Governors’ Association meeting.

“Brynn Thomas provided invaluable assistance to the governor,” said Mackey. “He took the point on coastal issues and emergency management and took the lead for logistics for many events. He has been a valuable member of the senior staff.”

Thomas is a licensed real estate broker and has served on the N.C. State Fire and Rescue Commission, and the N.C. Ports Railway Commission. When in Craven County, he was a member of New Bern Area Chamber of Commerce and Craven County Jaycees.

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Women gaining on men in M.B.A. aspirations

More women than ever are hoping to get into business school, potentially bringing gender equality to a once male-dominated field, a survey of M.B.A.-program hopefuls suggests.

Based on voluntary responses from students around the world and carried out by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the study found that 48 percent of M.B.A.-program hopefuls were women, up from 46 percent last year and 35 percent in 2006. While those figures do not necessarily reflect actual enrollment in business schools, they do point to a changing trend.

In Western Europe, women make up an even higher share of M.B.A.-program hopefuls, 54 percent, according to the survey, which sampled nearly 4,000 prospective M.B.A. students. Survey participants were drawn from registrants for the QS World Top MBA Tour.

— CHRISTOPHER F. SCHUETZE